

at offensive tackle on the bar flag-football team.
when drunk, in fact, he will sometimes wax quite witty,
though more often his eyes just fill
with sleep and failure.

in appearance, he reminds some of us of gatsby,
although g. started out rich
his father a high-priced physician,
and went rapidly nowhere.
his wife, like himself, is spoiled and beautiful;
she is forever leaving him.

lately the beer and dope and pills
had seemed to be getting the better of him.
he shot himself in the chest, allegedly by accident,
not too long ago,
and he's had three 502's in the past two months.

so he spent last week in the hospital,
drying out and undergoing aversion therapy,
replete with films and lectures, humiliations,
and that medicine that knocks you off your ass,
if you so much as sniff a drink.

he got out yesterday
and today he was back in the bar.
at first he just hung onto a coke bottle,
and then i noticed him squeezing a beer.
he took a couple of tentative sips,
and rose immediately to stride,
with the controlled haste of a true aristocrat,
to the men's room.

when he came out, however,
he went right back at that beer,
like a cowpoke dead-assed determined to break
the bronc that threw him,

like jack dempsey climbing back inside the ropes.

the kid has character.

COMMISERATION

when i called ron tonight,
he was storming about his apartment, wearing a path in
the carpet,
etching in the acid of his salivating wit
a fit reply to an unusually obnoxious junior editor.

this oaf had returned his poems with, "it's about time you gave up this hard-guy pose ... who do you think you are calling people 'fruits'??? ... only dean martin still goes around calling people fruits, etc. etc."

ron had decided to reply, "okay, you've got me, i'll let down my guard. the truth is i've been crippled since a childhood bout with polio. bound to a wheel chair, and not much of a man at all, i need to pretend i am tough."

ron's great at answering those things.
my favorite was the time the editor, abusing him,
had the gall to enclose an order-form for his own latest book.
ron ordered one million copies, c.o.d.

i like most editors,
they're altruistic, over-worked, generally fair,
and must constantly deal with the elephantiasis of the pseudo-poetic ego.
still somehow they remain not only courteous, but encouraging.

from time-to-time, however, i still hear from a real grunt-brain.
the most recent said he could tell exactly where i was at, because he'd been there just two years ago, just before he took his first creative-writing course.

he said my writing would improve
as i exposed myself to great books and great authors.
i liked chuck's interpretation of that -- that i should un-zip my fly in front of joyce carol oates.

one woman said she pitied me because i hated everything.
another said i ought to smoke more dope.
occasionally i get called "prof" or "doc."
most simply say, "this isn't poetry."

once in a while i'll write back threatening
to make minced dactyls out of them,
but most of the time i just stew a day or two
phrasing fifty or sixty rejoinders, and then forget it.

ron, old buddy, i know how you feel,
what pisses you off is that you let them bother you at all.

-- Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA